

**Friendship Heights
Transportation Management District
Advisory Committee
July 13, 2010**

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Voting Members Present

Joe Dixon	GEICO
William P. Farley (Chair)	Town of Somerset
Kerri Gates	The JBG Companies
Tiffany Gee (Vice Chair)	Chevy Chase Land Company
David Glass	Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers
Bill McCloskey	Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights
Robert Schwarzbart	Friendship Heights Village Council

Non-Voting Members Present

Sandra L. Brecher	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
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TMD Staff Present

Nakengi Byrd	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
Jim Carlson	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
Sheila Wilson	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services

Absent

Chief Roy Gordon	Chevy Chase Village Police
Capt. Russell Hamill	Montgomery County Police
Kenneth Hartman	B-CC Services Center

Guests

Ed Axler	M-NCPPC
April Birnbaum	Lerch, Early & Brewer
Robert Cope	Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights
Julie Davis	Somerset House Management Assn.
Bob Joiner	The Agenda News
Cobey R. Kuff	Wisconsin Place
Ann F. Lewis	Friendship Heights Village
Gail Tait-Nouri	MC DOT

Abbreviations used herein include:

MCBAG = Montgomery County Bicycle Action Group

M-NCPPC = Park & Planning

TIGER II = Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery

WMATA = Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Item 1 & 2 – Introductions/Minutes Approval: Members and guest introduced themselves; the June minutes were approved without changes.

Item 3 – Chair Comments: Chair **William Farley** thanked outgoing Chair **Robert Schwarzbart** for his years leading the Committee and steering it through the many challenges the TMD has faced. **Mr. Farley** led the Committee in a round of applause thanking **Mr. Schwarzbart**.

Mr. Farley introduced new Committee candidates:

- **Julie Davis** / Somerset House Management Association
- **Kerri Gates** / The JBG Companies
- **Tiffany Gee** / The Chevy Chase Land Company
- **Ann Lewis** / Friendship Heights Village
- **Christine McGrew** / M-NCPPC (“Park and Planning”)

New member nominations for the first four candidates are pending County Council vote, scheduled for July 20, 2010. **Jim Carlson** said that **Christine McGrew**, scheduled for a Council vote on July 27th, may not be the member ultimately nominated for the Committee by M-NCPPC (Park and Planning). The details regarding that appointment have not yet been finalized. **Mr. Carlson** said **Ms. McGrew** replaced **Charles Kines**, who attended previous meetings but was reassigned.

Item 4 – County Bikeways: Item 4 was postponed pending arrival of guest **Gail Tait-Nouri**.

Item 5 – Metro Ridership: **Mr. Farley** introduced **Robert Cope**, former Chair and Committee member. **Mr. Cope** provided three handouts (included in meeting packet) illustrating Metrorail ridership numbers for selected stations on the Maryland Red Line, which includes Friendship Heights. **Mr. Cope** said he began compiling ridership data in 1992-93, while Chair of the Citizens’ Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights and during development of the Friendship Heights Sector Plan. **Mr. Cope** said he had not compiled data on the other side of the Red Line, with Silver Spring and Glenmont, because he was trying to show ridership in the Friendship Heights area during the time the Sector Plan was under review.

Mr. Cope directed the Committee’s attention to the first handout, which shows all trips departing the Friendship Heights Metro station. In 1985 the Friendship Heights Metro had the highest average weekday passenger boardings among the eight stations being compared:

- Friendship Heights / 5,674
- Bethesda / 5,011
- Medical Center / 2,715
- Grosvenor / 2,618
- White Flint / 2,199
- Twinbrook / 2,354
- Rockville / 2,140
- Shady Grove / 4,050

Although the data is not included, **Mr. Cope** said he believed the Silver Spring ridership was probably higher than Friendship Heights.

By the year 2010, although Shady Grove and Bethesda had surpassed the Friendship Heights station, it remained number three or four on the Red Line in overall ridership. Friendship Heights showed a peak in ridership of 10,189 in 2008. **Mr. Cope** attributed the increase in 2008 to the economic downturn, providing a disincentive for driving and supporting greater transit use.

In comparing Bethesda and Friendship Heights for the years 2000 and 2010 (handouts: “Bethesda Metro Ridership 2000-2010” / “Friendship Heights Metro Ridership 2000-2010”), entry to both stations (e.g., exiting the TMD) have increased. **Mr. Cope** added that the Committee has generally discussed entries

and exits in terms of the “up staircase” during the morning peak period, indicating arrivals, and “down staircase”, denoting departures, being the more important during the evening peak.

Mr. Cope noted that commuters in Bethesda entering the station from 2000 to 2010, averaging the morning peak and off-peak numbers, have increased but not by a large number. Friendship Heights also shows a more or less static entry number during this time, with station exits (entry to the TMD) also showing a slight increase.

Mr. Schwarzbart asked if the data is compiled on a fiscal year or calendar year basis, since WMATA has produced ridership for 2010 and is only half way through the year. **Mr. Cope** said WMATA always selects May as a typical ridership month for the collection of data. **Ms. Brecher** added that planners try to avoid those months when vacations, school closings, etc. would produce a larger impact on ridership. This is the same for traffic counts, which are conducted at times when most commuters are at work and school is still in session.

Mr. Cope said one of the reasons he looked into these numbers during development of the Friendship Heights Sector Plan was because the redevelopment plans under consideration at the time (before the present Wisconsin Place development) would have allowed two or three large retailers to occupy the former Hecht's site. Hecht's was owned during this time by the May Company, a retailer, so therefore the site would have been dedicated exclusively to retail.

The May Company pointed to the high numbers for Fashion Centre at Pentagon City and other retail-oriented developments as evidence of the high Metro ridership these types of developments generate.

Mr. Cope said he started looking at the number of high rise residential communities beyond Fashion Centre that were also served by the stop, indicating the importance of putting residences over subway stops.

Mr. Cope said the heavy use of the Metro stations is a part of the grade the TMD receives for managing transportation in Friendship Heights.

Mr. Farley said that in connection with Metro use for retail, one does not very often see people boarding with large boxes and burdened with packages. Isn't it more likely the service industries, such as restaurants, draw people to the TMD? **Mr. Cope** answered yes, along with residential use; both tended to be the bigger drivers of Metro use. **Mr. Cope** said he originally started compiling the station ridership numbers in response to claims from Hecht's and New England Development that retail stores would be the prime draw.

Ms. Brecher added that, although the TMD promotes transit to shoppers and residents to a degree, its primary focus under the legislation is employee commuting; more specifically, employees coming to work during the peak periods. So, it is really the people working in the retail stores, the offices and the service industries that the TMD sees as its primary target group.

Mr. Schwarzbart said that in addition to those people arriving to work at the offices and stores, there is a significant number that is also passing through the TMD.

Bill McCloskey said there did not seem to be any way to identify where specifically the riders identified in the WMATA boarding data are going – they could be residents or employees, or coming to shop. **Ms. Brecher** said the County's Annual Commuter Survey has more detailed information concerning origin and destination, and identifies those commuting to work. **Ms. Brecher** added that the WMATA data provides a very accurate count of riders because it's data that is collected at the fare gate. The commuter survey, on the other hand, relies on voluntary completion by employees at selected work sites. Employers

of a certain size are required to participate in the survey under the County Code, but individual employees, unless required to do so by their employer, are not under any sort of mandate to complete a survey. The accuracy of the County's survey is greatly enhanced by fuller participation of employees, especially when employers provide a "good faith effort" to achieve at least an 80 percent participation rate called for under the Code.

David Glass said that he has seen Metro conducting surveys of commuters that elicit more specific trip information, similar to the County's survey. **Ms. Brecher** agreed that the system does conduct those types of on-board surveys periodically. She added that census update data from Park & Planning is also valuable in identifying commuter travel patterns.

Ed Axler said Park & Planning does update commuting data using certain 'census zones.' To the extent that any given census zone includes the TMD, there would be additional information available.

Return to Item 4 – County Bikeways: **Gail Tait-Nouri**, Montgomery County Bikeways Planner in Engineering Services, introduced herself and made display maps of the County's bikeways system available to the Committee. **Ms. Tait-Nouri** manages the capital program that constructs bicycle facilities; there is also a program available that installs bike racks for employers. The County will, upon request, install bike racks in public rights of way. The program, which is very popular and currently has a wait list, grew out of frequent requests for racks that employers and property managers were receiving from bicyclists.

Ms. Tait-Nouri said there are a very large number of bicyclists in Montgomery County, so the Department of Transportation (DOT) is responding to the increased demand for better signage and better overall bicycle facilities. The County works with a group called Montgomery Bike, an advocacy group that advises on priorities and gives guidance on bicycle issues. Other groups, such as DC Bike, also provide input to the County's bikeways program. The County also works with the Montgomery County Bicycle Action Group (MCBAG), created to gain input from citizens interested in recreational and on-road cycling issues.

Ms. Tait-Nouri, referring to the presentation map, said there is an extensive network of current and planned bicycle routes based on the County's Master Plan. Not all of them are built since many are based on future development. Many are on a waiting list – for example, on Wisconsin Avenue there is supposed to be a path from the Chevy Chase Country Club to Oliver Street; the estimate for the path is about \$1.5 million – currently on hold.

Mr. Glass asked what the \$1.5 million for the path was for. **Ms. Tait-Nouri** said the largest portion of the cost is for land for a right of way, which must be purchased from the Country Club.

Mr. Carlson asked if the surface of most trails is asphalt. **Ms. Tait-Nouri** said yes, most are asphalt. With the exception of the interim Georgetown Branch Trail, the County does not use crushed stone paths, and asphalt is also the easiest travel surface for the type of tires cyclists typically use. The asphalt surface allows the thin road tires, preferred by most cyclists, to travel 20-30 mph. In general, cyclists prefer a road surface similar to that used by motorists and, in many cases, cyclists would also prefer to travel on the roads with traffic to avoid pedestrians, strollers etc. that they encounter on the sidewalks or off-road paths.

Mr. Schwarzbart said cyclist travel poses a problem, which he said has brought up in previous meetings when the issue has been discussed. He stressed that bicycling is a nice idea and he has spent a lot of time biking himself. But Montgomery County is very large and diverse with large population centers and traffic congestion. There is almost a New York City style traffic area in Friendship Heights. **Mr.**

Schwarzbart said he is concerned about safety and, while he supports the idea of promoting bicycle use, Friendship Heights is not the same kind of environment one would find in Urbana or other less congested areas. As was pointed out, cyclists encountering traffic congestion are frequently forced onto the sidewalks; this poses an additional problem since many pedestrians, like drivers, are distracted by their cell phones and other devices.

Mr. Schwarzbart added that the bike path plan presented at the meeting is about 12 years old and does not take into account the recent new development; nor does it consider the “alpine” nature of the hills in the Friendship Heights area which make cycling a challenge. **Mr. Schwarzbart** said bicycles will always be with us, but he does not believe the County should be officially encouraging their use in this area.

Ms. Tait-Nouri, in reference to the sidewalk use issue, said if the County could make bicycling on the roads more favorable, then cyclists would not feel forced to use sidewalks and this would solve a number of problems. **Mr. Schwarzbart** said that making the roads any more bicycle friendly can’t be done; and it is not good for the cyclists since they have to inhale the fumes from traffic. **Ms. Tait-Nouri** agreed that use of the sidewalks requires more care and awareness, but noted that there should be a balance between meeting needs of the cyclists and non-cyclist on the public rights of way. For instance, in Silver Spring the County has constructed separate bike paths and sidewalks, where feasible, to meet the needs of both types of users. She agreed that there is not enough room at times on a four or five foot sidewalk for pedestrians, some with strollers, and cyclists; the County has received complaints about this, especially regarding Wisconsin Avenue.

Ms. Tait-Nouri, in response to a question from **Mr. Carlson** regarding the use of Wisconsin Avenue, said that bicyclists are allowed on any road in Montgomery County that is posted 50 mph or below. **Ms. Brecher** added that bikes are also allowed on all sidewalks unless posted otherwise.

Ms. Tait-Nouri said many bicyclists coming into Friendship Heights are continuing on into DC, using the District’s network of bicycle paths, especially the Capital Crescent Trail. An estimated 1.5 million riders use the Capital Crescent each year. So the demand for bicycle paths is clearly there; and, with safer options, there would be greater bicycle use.

Mr. Schwarzbart noted that there is a bicycle route along Park Avenue which has a very steep grade, making it difficult to navigate. **Ms. Tait-Nouri** agreed, but said that bikers are experienced at finding new routes and ways around obstacles. The average distance for a bicyclist is about 20 miles, presenting a variety of different challenges and terrains.

Robert Cope suggested that people take the time to view the Wisconsin Place Development, which has a bike path built with brick pavers. However, on the other side of Wisconsin Avenue at the Chevy Chase Land Company development the path is asphalt, which is not as attractive but offers a safer surface for cyclists. There needs to be a “second page” to the bicycle path meeting materials that says, ‘If the Planning Board is going to require a bicycle path, then that path should be made of X materials (asphalt, brick pavers, etc.)’ in order to have one standard in the County.

Mr. Glass added that he did not see any realistic way to accommodate a bicyclist along a major road like Wisconsin Avenue. Installing a separate bike path on the road would increase traffic congestion.

Mr. Glass asked about the cost of the County’s bicycle program; **Ms. Tait-Nouri** said it is about \$550,000 per year. Since the average distance is about 20 miles per day, and about 1.5 million people use the Capital Crescent Trail each year just to get to DC, the cost and fuel savings by taking cars off the road are substantial.

Mr. Schwarzbart said the difficulty is in trying to find an appropriate place for a bike path in Friendship Heights. The idea of bringing bikes to the area would be to get them through Maryland to the District. Wisconsin Avenue is the main thoroughfare, and the previous discussion has outlined the problems with using Wisconsin. As an alternative there is Friendship Boulevard, also a north-south artery. However, between Willard and Western the road narrows down to one northbound lane with two lanes in the opposite direction. It does not lend itself to use for bicycles, and there have been a number of safety issues noted over last several months along that stretch of road. **Ms. Tait-Nouri** said most cyclists learn over time to avoid those areas that present a problem for them, even those that are designated as bicycle routes. Cyclists will typically find a better way.

Ms. Tait-Nouri added that many routes in Friendship Heights which appear on the displayed map are merely suggested routes for cyclists – not planned bike paths or other facilities – and future routes will depend on development.

Julie Davis said that when the Friendship Heights Sector Plan was being debated before the Planning Board and Council in the 90s, there was testimony from a number of bike advocate groups at the hearings that the Sector Plan was “a joke,” to use their words. No one commuting on a bicycle would use the suggested route, for instance to the Metro station, precisely because of all the issues that have so far been discussed regarding safety. **Ms. Tait-Nouri** agreed it is an old plan, but provides a starting point for discussion and can be refined with more input.

Ms. Davis asked if the County’s Annual Commuter Survey asked any specific questions about bicycle commuting. **Ms. Brecher** said the survey does ask about the travel mode. Staff will bring the mode split information to the next meeting.

Ed Axler said the bike advocacy groups also survey commuters, so that might be a good source to check.

Item 6 – Updates: **Ms. Brecher** said Montgomery County is participating in a region-wide bike sharing grant proposal, under the TIGER II grant (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery). Under the grant, Montgomery County would construct a number of bike sharing stations at key locations. Bike sharing, like car sharing (Zipcar, Flexcar, etc.), involves the short term rental of a bicycle; unlike car sharing, however, the bicycle does not have to be returned to the same location where it was checked out. The concept is to have a network of ‘hubs’ or bike sharing stations, similar to the SmartBike system currently in use in DC. Such systems have worked very successfully in Europe for many years.

Under the new grant there will be around 100 bike sharing stations in the Metro DC area, expanding the current effort underway in DC and Arlington, into a larger region-wide interrelated system.

The County has met the threshold for local match funding under TIGER II, and final applications must be submitted by the end of August. The award is due some time this fall or possibly by the end of the calendar year. By 2011 there will be capital funding – the award is for capital investment only – to put the bike sharing stations in place. The plan for Montgomery County is for 50-60 stations. These would be stretched along the Red Line on the west side from Friendship Heights to the Medical Center station in the general vicinity of the Metro station corridor. East side stations would be from Takoma Park to Forest Glen. The spacing of the stations will extend the walking distance between stations for non-drivers.

Ms. Brecher said bike sharing will be a membership based system, similar to the BIXI system in Montreal. For an annual membership fee – about \$80 – bikes are available for 30 minutes use; beyond 30 minutes there is a small additional charge. The bike can be returned to any other bike hub, in contrast to car sharing, which requires the car be returned to the origin. Bikes will also be available for daily use for a separate charge.

Ms. Brecher added that the bike stations will be solar powered; although, depending on the location, there may be instances where supplemental power is needed. Stations consist of a platform with vertical bollards, which secure the bicycles, and a credit card pay station next to it. There are several sizes, for accommodating a smaller or larger number of bikes. There will not be as many bikes as there are places to put them, since the number of bikes at any one station will vary with use and spaces have to be available for returns.

Ms. Brecher added that there has been a planned bike station at the Silver Spring Metro since the inception of the new transit center. There has never been a funding source for the station. Now, with TIGER II, there may finally be funding for the station.

Mr. Glass asked if there is money to be made from this system, why does the County need to be putting money into it. **Ms. Brecher** said there isn't a lot of money to be made through bike sharing, at least not at this juncture. **Mr. Glass** added that Montgomery County is never going to be Copenhagen, so it does not seem to be a good use of funding. **Ms. Brecher** said the County expects the stations to be self-funding operationally in the space of four to five years. That does not address the initial capital investment, but that investment is not immense. Montgomery County has a \$2.5 million share of the total \$11 million TIGER II grant, so must meet 20 percent of the \$2.5 million.

Mr. McCloskey asked if there were any plans to have bike sharing in Friendship Heights on the DC side. **Ms. Brecher** said she believed that Tenley Town is the closest, which is not too far. Friendship Heights then would not be very far by bike from Tenley Town.

Ms. Brecher said the County is also pursuing its Request for Proposal (RFP) for car sharing vendors to be able to provide spaces in the County's public garages. There have been several responses, and they will be evaluated for their ability to provide both garage and on-street car sharing spaces. On-street parking is preferred by car sharing vendors for ease of use for their customers and for high visibility.

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 AM
Next meeting date: Sept. 14, 2010